



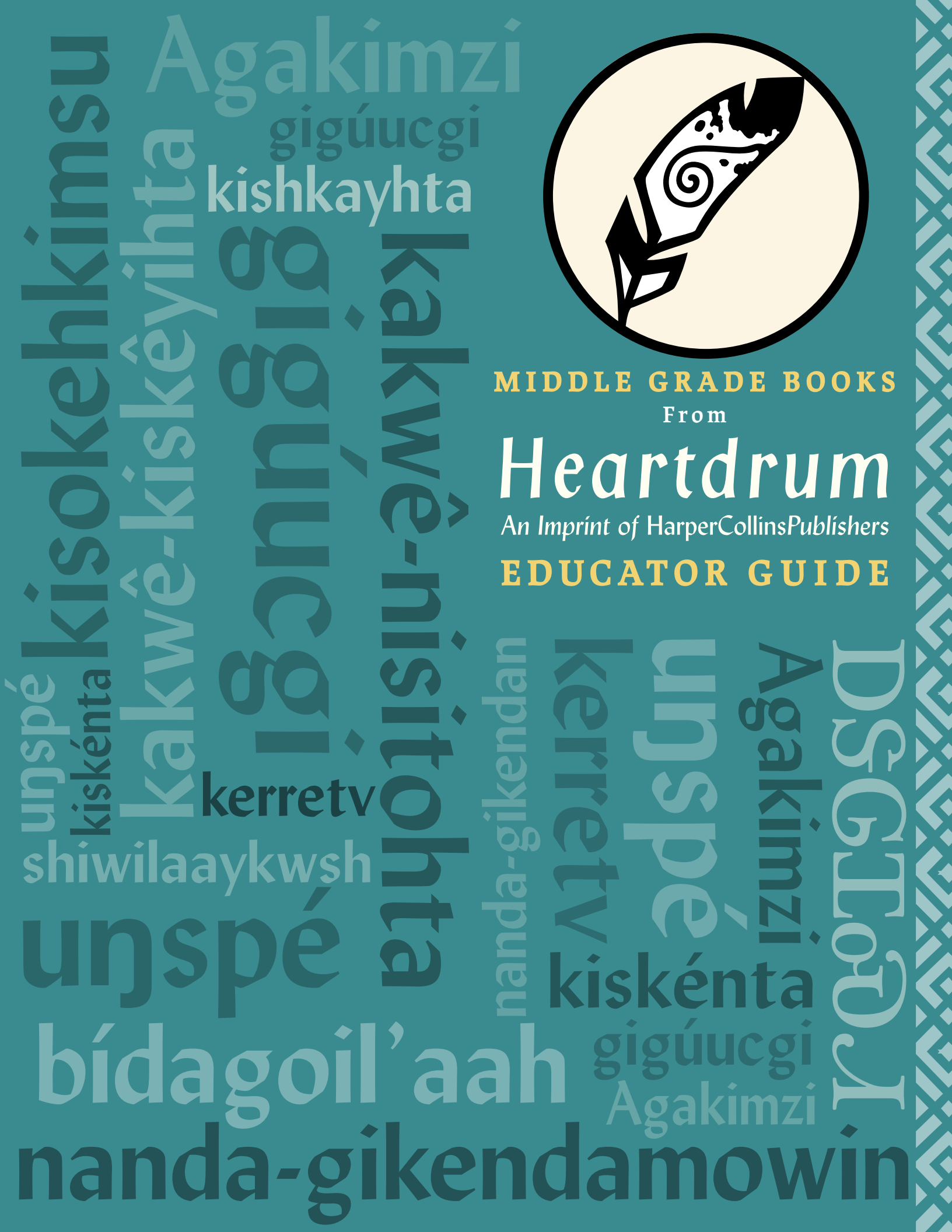
MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS

From

*Heartdrum*

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

EDUCATOR GUIDE



# Chapter Books and Middle Grade Books from Heartdrum

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# Why is Native literature important?

Heartdrum is a Native-focused imprint of HarperCollins Children's Books and is a leader in the movement of publishing equitable and inclusive titles for young readers. The imprint “evokes the heartbeat of the Native community” by offering books representing today's 1000+ tribal Nations located within the borders of the United States and Canada. Heartdrum is dedicated to shining a spotlight on Native and First Nations characters, topics, and points of view while raising up Indigenous creatives as well as their literary and visual art.

According to current publishing data, most people haven't yet read contemporary books with Indigenous protagonists. Children's and young adult literature that includes a wide variety of cultures, traditions, and beliefs can help both Native and non-Native readers experience life on a larger scale. Stories dedicated to Indigenous, modern-day characters promote empathy by letting readers vicariously experience their struggles, celebrations, and daily lives. Reading these books creates opportunities for teachers and students (Native or non-Native) to better understand one another and to communicate more effectively.

**Click [here](#) to learn more about the Heartdrum imprint.**

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.





# Jo Jo Makoons: Fancy Pants

by Dawn Quigley, illustrated by Tara Audibert

## About the book

Filled with lots of glitter, raised pinkies, and humorous misunderstandings, this second book in the Jo Jo Makoons series is filled with the joy of a young Ojibwe girl discovering her very own special shine from the inside out.

**Dawn Quigley** is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. The first book in her Jo Jo Makoons chapter book series was selected as a best book of the year by *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and *American Indians in Children's Literature*, and received five starred reviews; it was also chosen as a Charlotte Huck Award Honor Book and an AILA Honor Book. Her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, was awarded an American Indian Youth Literature Honor. She has a PhD and is an education, university faculty member, and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector.

**Tara Audibert** is a multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, cartoonist, animator, and podcaster. She owns and runs Moxy Fox Studio where she creates her award-winning works, including the animated short film *The Importance of Dreaming*, comics *This Place: 150 Years Retold* and *Lost Innocence*, and “Nitap: Legends of the First Nations,” an animated storytelling app. She is of Wolastoqey/French heritage and resides in Sunny Corner, New Brunswick, Canada.

## Discussion questions

1. Reread pages 4–6. What do you learn about Jo Jo's name, her grandparents, and her Ojibwe and Michif languages?
2. What event makes Jo Jo Makoons wonder about the meaning of the word *fancy*?
3. Jo Jo misunderstands what people say sometimes. When Kokum says she has a “rainy-day fund,” what does Jo Jo think? What does a rainy-day fund mean? Do you have one? What special thing are you saving for?
4. Choose your favorite illustration. Why did you choose it? How did it help you understand that part of the story? How does your life connect to what's happening in the scene?
5. Jo Jo helps Kokum dust and teaches her new dance moves. How does doing her chores help Jo Jo at the wedding reception?
6. While getting ready for the wedding, Jo Jo observes the details of Mama's and Kokum's dresses. What is missing from Jo Jo's dress that both Mama and Kokum have on theirs?
7. In the end, what does Jo Jo realize about being fancy? What does she tell her auntie?

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**Curriculum Connections:** characterization; problem-solution; vocabulary; responsibility; contributing to community; kindness; empathy; humor; discovering identity; making a plan; researching answers; determination; education is important; reading a glossary; Ojibwe culture and values; kinship; ancestral connection; language preservation.





# Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend

by Dawn Quigley, illustrated by Tara Audibert

## About the book

The first book in a chapter book series about a spunky young Ojibwe girl who loves who she is, written by American Indian Youth Literature Honor-winning author Dawn Quigley (Ojibwe), and illustrated by artist Tara Audibert (Wolastoqey).

**Dawn Quigley** is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. Her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, was awarded an American Indian Youth Literature Honor. She has a PhD and is an education university faculty member, and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector. She lives in Minnesota.

**Tara Audibert** is a multidisciplinary artist, filmmaker, cartoonist, animator, and podcaster. She owns and runs Moxy Fox Studio where she creates her award-winning works, including the animated short film *The Importance of Dreaming*, comics *This Place: 150 Years Retold* and *Lost Innocence*, and “Nitap: Legends of the First Nations,” an animated storytelling app. She is of Wolastoqey/French heritage and resides in Sunny Corner, New Brunswick, Canada.

## Discussion questions

1. Before you read, study the cover art, read “About This Story,” and look at the character wall. What kind of person do you think Jo Jo Makoons is? What do you think will happen in this story?
2. Next, look at the cat illustration at the beginning of chapter 1. What does her expression mean? Make a guess: What is the cat telling you about chapter 1?
3. Mama calls out, “Josephine Makoons Azure” to ask a question. What do you think that means? When did your caregiver call you by your full name? Tell a friend what happened.
4. Jo Jo Makoons says that she doesn’t understand her kokum’s way of thinking a few timesthroughout the story. What does she mean about understanding her Elder?
5. Kokum’s advice is to be friendly to everyone by saying please and thank you, by smiling, and by holding back and not saying something that’s not nice. What is your advice for finding new friends?
6. (Bonus) During the class lesson, Chuck writes, “Dog jogged on the log.” And Jo Jo writes, “Please do not touch the couch.” Who understands how to rhyme words? Explain how.

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children’s Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.

**Curriculum Connections:** learning new vocabulary; identifying what fiction means; previewing a story and making predictions; understanding character traits; making inferences; building meaning from illustrations; learning about diabetes (Classroom Toolkit at [www2.jdrf.org](http://www2.jdrf.org)); Native/First Nations values: community sharing, respect for Elders, caring for the environment by reusing materials and enjoying humor.





# Two Tribes

by Emily Bowen Cohen

## About the book

In a moving story of identity, Mia is struggling to navigate life with her mother, new step-father, and her Jewish Day school community. On the cusp of her bat mitzvah, she begins to question the nature of belonging and why she is largely estranged from her father and Muscogee family in Oklahoma. When her mother refuses to talk about it, she takes a clandestine solo trip to visit her father, to foster a connection with her Muscogee heritage. She learns where she belongs: as a member of two tribes with similarities and differences that make her wholly who she is: Jewish and Muscogee.

**Emily Bowen Cohen** is a member of the Muscogee Nation. She spent her childhood in Okemah, OK, and her teen years in Montclair, NJ, before graduating from Harvard University. She and her husband live in Los Angeles.

## Discussion questions

1. The title of the book is *Two Tribes*. Kinship and tradition are important to both Jewish people and Native American communities. How are these exemplified in the story? Can you provide examples of where they share similarities?

2. At the beginning of the book, we see Mia reading a story called *Little Indian Girl*. She hopes it will provide her insights on what it means to be Native American. How does the imagery depict Native Americans? What is the purpose of this imagery in the larger story?
3. How does the author demonstrate the impacts of colonization on the Muscogee people? What are some examples?
4. In the story, Mia is unsure where she belongs. This is often a refrain people of mixed heritage express. How does Mia reconcile where she belongs? What are some examples of the balance she finds between her two cultures?
5. It is easy to feel out of place when you belong to several different cultures. Are there places in your own life where you feel you have to be one way or another? How do you navigate those spaces?
6. This story deals candidly with microaggressions (common, everyday slights and comments that relate to various aspects of one's appearance or identity). Can you think of a time where you have experienced or witnessed a microaggression? How does the author deal with microaggressions in this story?
7. Mia's parents play significant roles in the story arc. Why is that important? How do they ultimately support Mia in understanding her full self?
8. Each character displays some measure of growth. Pick a character and describe an example of their growth. How do they demonstrate a better understanding or new perspective?

Guide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and the library director at The Cambridge School of Weston. She regularly gives talks on decolonizing practices in libraries and libraries that are curated by students for students.





# The Sea in Winter

by Christine Day

## About the book

In this evocative and heartwarming novel, the author of *I Can Make This Promise* tells the story of a Makah/Piscataway girl struggling to find her joy again, and the family who will protect her no matter what.

**Christine Day's** (Upper Skagit) debut novel, *I Can Make This Promise*, was a best book of the year from *Kirkus*, *School Library Journal*, NPR, and the Chicago Public Library, as well as a Charlotte Huck Award Honor Book. She holds a master's degree from the University of Washington, where she created a thesis on Coast Salish weaving traditions. Christine lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband.

## Discussion questions

1. Maisie's teacher begins class with a writing activity. Students must journal using the word *sanctuary* and/or its meaning. Reread Maisie's entry on page 3. What would you describe as your *sanctuary*? Why? Write your own journal entry.
2. Maisie reacts to the loss of her dream by isolating herself from her friends and family. Her mood changes and she is quick-tempered with people she loves. Have you ever had a similar reaction in your life? What advice would you give Maisie to help her through tough times?
3. The author weaves history about conflict between the U.S. government and Native American Nations throughout this story. Resilience and moving forward with the strength of your ancestors is a recurring theme, something Maisie must learn. Choose one conflict in history mentioned in the book and discuss how hearing that story helps Maisie move forward and grow. What did you learn about being resilient? How can you apply this value to your life?
4. Nature provides many gifts, including "a little heart medicine," as Mom describes it on page 61. What do you think she means? Find one section in the book where Maisie uses her observation skills to describe the places on their trip. How does this description make you feel when you read it? Locate two to three lines that help you visualize the setting. Read them out loud to a partner or small group and explain why the lines intrigue you.
5. On page 150, Mom tells Maisie, "Dreams change. Realities change. People change. We all go through it in different ways." How does this statement apply to Maisie's situation? Explain how this remark applies to your life.
6. Chapter titles provide a hint about what is coming. Choose one chapter title and summarize that chapter in five sentences. Then, explain the connection between the title and the summary. (Hint: the Author's Note explains more details about two chapter titles.)

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.

**Curriculum Connections:** Makah Nation history; Indigenous Treaties and land loss; Indian Citizenship Act of 1924; prejudice and stereotyping; ecological effects of river dams; the environmental importance of salmon (clams, gray whales, "nursery stumps," or oceans); narrative arc and other elements of story, such as setting; writing description and authentic dialogue; physical therapists and/or mental health therapists; finding "your sanctuary"; values, such as respect for Elders, reciprocity, perseverance, forgiveness, and courage; North American archaeology; geology of the Pacific Northwest, including earthquakes.





# We Still Belong

by Christine Day

## About the book

Spend Indigenous Peoples' Day with Wesley, a twelve-year-old whose ancestors—including her mom—are Upper Skagit. Despite Wesley's careful planning, nothing seems to go her way on this special day. Learn how her connection to family and friends, along with her cultural teachings, help her make the celebration even better than she'd imagined it could ever be.

**Christine Day** (Upper Skagit) grew up in Seattle, nestled between the sea, the mountains, and the pages of her favorite books. Her two previous novels, *I Can Make This Promise* and *The Sea in Winter*, were both selected as American Indian Youth Literature Award Honor Books and named best books of the year by numerous media outlets. Christine lives in the Pacific Northwest with her family.

## Discussion questions

1. At the beginning of the book, Wesley looks around her living room. What do the items she sees tell us about what Wesley and her family value? Are they similar or different from what we would find in your living room at home?
2. Ryan makes some assumptions about Wesley when he learns she's an only child. We see this later in the book again when Wesley learns about the TOLO prediction involving Ella and Ryan. When is a time you've jumped to conclusions about someone? How did you make it right?
3. How do gemmakitty01 and Skye use their social media networks to teach others about Native culture? In what ways can you offer support to and inform others about issues and topics that are important to you?
4. Identify a situation in the book where Wesley and her Native culture are overlooked by fellow classmates, teachers, or school policies. When was a time you felt like you were invisible? What did you do to feel seen?
5. Wesley recalls on page 101 some advice that her grandfather gave her: "The things that scare us the most in this world are usually the most worthwhile things in our lives." Discuss why you agree or disagree with Grandpa's advice.
6. In chapter 38, Grandpa refers to languages as a "gift." Why doesn't he speak Lushootseed like his ancestors before him?
7. Discuss the differences in feedback Wesley received from Mr. Holt versus the attendees at the intertribal powwow at Coastline High School. What lessons could Wesley take from these two experiences?

Guide prepared by Odia Wood-Krueger, a consultant who focuses on community engagement and curriculum writing projects. She is Métis from Saskatchewan, Canada, and currently calls Minneapolis home.

**Curriculum Connections:** Indigenous Peoples' Day; U.S. federal boarding schools and their role in loss of culture and language; language revitalization efforts; powwow event details; regalia; jingle dress teachings and history; making connections; building community; tribal citizenship; tribal; sovereignty.





# Red Bird Danced

by Dawn Quigley

## About the book

Two characters work through their emotions and grief after a beloved auntie goes missing. Eleven-year-old Ariel loves ballet and the way her feet feel as they hover while she dances. But she has not been dancing since her Auntie Bineshiinh disappeared. Her neighbor, twelve-year-old Tomah, feels the only person in their urban Native community who sees him is Ariel. Tomah sits on the bench outside his door and watches the birds, as well as everyone else as they come and go. He likes to make people laugh to hide his inability to read. The words dance too fast on the page for him to understand. Together, Ariel and Tomah find strength in their intertribal community neighborhood and stories about their cherished auntie to cope and survive throughout the seasons.

**Dawn Quigley** is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, North Dakota. Both her first book in the Jo Jo Makoons series, *Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-to-Be Best Friend*, and her debut YA novel, *Apple in the Middle*, were awarded American Indian Youth Literature Honors. She is a PhD education university faculty member and a former K–12 reading and English teacher, as well as an Indian Education program codirector. You can find her online at [dawnquigley.com](http://dawnquigley.com).

## Discussion questions

1. What image did author Dawn Quigley use throughout the book? One example is on page 12 and another on page 34. Select three other examples to share and discuss.
2. Read the poem titled “Hiding Hearts” on pages 37-40. Why did the author choose this title? What do you learn about Ariel and Tomah?
3. Read the poem titled “Snow Kissed the Ground” on pages 47-52. How does this poem contribute to the story? What do you learn about each character (Tomah, Ariel, and Auntie)?
4. Read “The Knock,” pages 76-78. What happened? What is the most important line that emphasizes the situation? Why did you choose it?
5. Read “Danced Alone” on pages 83-88 and “Red, Red Is Calling” on page 88. What did Tomah do? How does the text and white space support the image of his actions?
6. In “Jingle Dress Healing,” on pages 93-95, you learn about a Native way of healing. Connect your life, culture, or something else to this passage. Explain and discuss.
7. The author uses poetic techniques to make meaning and craft a story that sings.. Choose two examples (repetition, figurative language, rhyme, line breaks, etc.) that stood out while reading. Share and discuss.
8. Read pages 110-128. How do these poems support the theme(s)? How do these poems help you live a productive life?

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children’s Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.

**Curriculum Connections:** Urban intertribal housing; community; Native cultures; identity; jingle dress dancing; health and healing; novel in verse structure; poetic devices (figurative language, repetition, word choice and white space, line breaks, etc.); nature and birds; struggling Readers; empathy; determination; loss and grief; Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (#MMIW) Movement; REDress Art Installation Project.





# Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids

edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith

## About the book

Featuring the voices of new and veteran Native writers, and edited by bestselling author Cynthia Leitich Smith, this collection of intersecting stories set at the same powwow bursts with hope, joy, resilience, the strength of community, and Native pride. Each story can be read individually, but read as a whole, the stories play off one another and intersect, providing a cohesive reading experience.

**Cynthia Leitich Smith** is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Sisters of the Neversea*, *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Most recently, she was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum. She is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

## Discussion questions

1. The first lines of a book hook the reader. In this book, the first section is a poem. How does this poem intrigue you and make you want to read on?

2. You'll notice the stories have a common thread—relationships. Choose one short story and describe the relationship between the characters. Why do you think building relationships with others is important? Why should people respect their Elders?
3. Which one of the short stories lingered most in your mind? Why did the story appeal to you? Name a memorable character and explain why you chose them.
4. According to the foreword to the book, the contributors coordinated their efforts to create this anthology. How do you think the team of authors organized the book *Ancestor Approved*? What are two overall themes of this collection of poems and stories?
5. Read the last poem in the book. Why do you think the book begins and ends with a poem? How are the poems connected to a theme about sharing cultures and traditions?
6. Reflect on what you learned while reading these stories. How can you connect new knowledge to your own life, family, and/or community?

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.

**Curriculum Connections:** land acknowledgement and map skills (investigate where each character starts their journey and acknowledge the tribes that once lived there with this resource <https://native-land.ca>; understand that there are more than one thousand contemporary Indigenous Nations within the borders of the United States and Canada (who they are, where they live, how they survive, resources used from the land, culture, and language); discuss stereotypes, racism, and mascot names respectfully; understand why people are connected to the land; identify regalia for various dances; learn Native values like community spirit, inclusion, and resilience; realize the importance of “belonging” and work to include others and help them feel safe.





# On a Wing and a Tear

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

## About the book

In this blending of traditional Indigenous folklore and contemporary middle grade adventure, Cynthia Leitich Smith delivers a heartfelt story of friendship and the interconnected nature of human and non-human relatives. In a nod to the traditional Muscogee story of the renowned stickball game waged between animals and birds, we are introduced to Ray Halfmoon and Melanie “Mel” Roberts, whose friendship deepens after Mel and her mother move into the attic in Ray and his grandfather’s bungalow. When grandfather Charlie Halfmoon discovers an injured bat taking refuge in his old oak tree, he soon learns there is about to be a rematch of the legendary ball game, and Great-Grandfather Bat needs to travel there in time to play. What ensues is a bumpy road trip south to Macon, Georgia, with Ray and Mel and a neighborhood squirrel in tow, as they attempt to transport Great-Grandfather Bat to the historic game. Along the way, our heroes visit family and make friends on high-stakes, healing, and humorous adventures, complicated by bumbling adversaries and heightened by a mysterious creature. Mel and Ray come to appreciate and embrace the connections that bind us all to each other, to our animal kin, and to ancestral lands.

**Cynthia Leitich Smith** is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, *On a Wing and a Tear*, *Sisters of the Neversea*, the Blue Stars series, *Harvest House*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Youth Literature Award. Cynthia is also the anthologist of *Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids* and was named the NSK Neustadt Laureate. She is the author-curator of Heartdrum, a Native-focused imprint at HarperCollins Children’s Books, and served as the Katherine Paterson Inaugural Endowed Chair on the faculty of the MFA program in writing for children and young adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Cynthia is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas, and Denton, Texas.

## Discussion questions

1. Does your family share stories that impart particular lessons? What are they?
2. What can traditional stories tell us about a community?
3. The legendary stickball game is a popular story told in a number of Native Nations whose ancestral lands are located in the southeastern United States. How does the author use this traditional story to share a particular worldview?
4. What do Ray and Mel learn about the interconnectedness of the Earth through the legendary game? Who matters? Why?
5. What is reciprocity? How is this demonstrated throughout the story? Give specific examples.

Guide prepared by Jenna Wolf. Jenna is tribally enrolled in Mvskoke Nation of Oklahoma and the library director at The Cambridge School of Weston. She regularly gives talks on decolonizing practices in libraries and libraries that are curated by students for students.





# Sisters of the Neversea

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

## About the book

In this modern take on the classic *Peter Pan*, award-winning author Cynthia Leitich Smith (Muscogee) brilliantly shifts the focus from the boy who won't grow up to Muscogee Lily and English Wendy—stepsisters who must face dangers and embrace wonders to find their way home to the family they love.

**Cynthia Leitich Smith** is the bestselling, acclaimed author of books for all ages, including *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*, *Indian Shoes*, *Jingle Dancer*, and *Hearts Unbroken*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award. Most recently, she was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate. Cynthia is the author-curator of Heartdrum. She is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

## Discussion questions

1. The idea of kinship, or a family connection, is central to Native cultures. Relatives respect, care for, and support one another. How can you connect this to the Roberts-Darling family?
2. Wendy and Lily travel through different environments on Neverland, an island surrounded by Neversea. Why is the forest important in this

story? Are all species important for keeping nature in balance? What do you think will happen to the baby tiger cub in the future?

3. Many stories include obstacles and opposing forces. In the beginning, Wendy and Lily seem at odds, but once they reunite on the island, they resolve their differences. How do they accomplish this? How can people resolve conflicts peacefully?
4. Elders have an important role in our lives, as stated in this excerpt from page 170: "Michael heard stories of generations past and present from Auntie Lillian and other elders around kitchen tables, and sometimes they all went together to community events with storytellers, too." Choose an elder from the story (Auntie Lillian; Clifford, the last Native Elder on the island; etc.) and explain why they are significant to the story.
5. Which character do you think achieved the most growth in a positive way? Explain why.
6. Why do you think the author chose third person omniscient point of view to write this story? How does this point of view help tell an engaging tale?

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.

**Curriculum Connections:** Muscogee Creek Nation history; Mound Builders; migration of five tribes into present day Oklahoma; Indian Removal Act of 1830; acculturation/assimilation; treaties and land loss; Freytag's plot pyramid and narrative arc; fantasy fiction genre; point of view; analyzing text (compare/contrast); author study—Cynthia Leitich Smith; ecosystems and the environment; biodiversity and balance in nature.





# Heroes of the Water Monster

by Brian Young

## About the book

In this dramatic companion to *Healer of the Water Monster*, Nathan and Edward must adjust to a blended family. Nathan is growing up and losing his ability to see Holy Beings, but Edward still has a lot to learn still about being a guardian for Nathan's young water monster, Dew. When Dew's big sister, Yitoo, enters the Fourth World, she suspects a monstrous Modern Enemy is to blame for the dried-up rivers near the Navajo Nation. To defeat the enemy, Nathan and Edward must work together with Holy Beings, and overcome inner doubts to decide whether to feel empathy or seek revenge.

## Discussion questions

1. Describe Nathan and Edward's family. On pages 67–69, what do Edward's inner thoughts reveal about himself and his feelings toward Nathan? What do Nathan's actions on pages 75–78 reveal about the boys' relationship?
2. What motivates Nathan? Identify his goal. What motivates Edward to continue the adventure? What is his goal? Explain using textual evidence.
3. On page 29, Edward teaches Dew how to wrestle. How does wrestling play a part in the journey and move the story forward? Explain with textual evidence, (Hint: read chapters 4, 24, and 26.)
4. Describe Yitoo and Dew's relationship with each other, in the beginning and at the end. How does their sibling relationship change? Explain using textual evidence.
5. Who is Modern Enemy? How are human beings affecting the natural world? Are all species important to keeping a balance in nature? Explain your position.
6. On page 19, Nathan's mother, Janet, and Edward's father, Ted, discuss a situation relating to the boys and they discuss another situation on pages 248–249. Debate when and how grownups should intervene in their children's lives. Give one example of how a grownup (like a family member or guardian) in your life intervened in a positive way. What was the outcome?
7. On pages 245–248, what does the author want you to know about his Navajo ancestors? After hearing about tragedies their ancestors endured, what lessons do Nathan and Edward learn? How can people move forward together?
8. Defend Nathan and Edward's decision to show empathy at the end. Explain using textual evidence.
9. Did Edward's blessing request on pages 341–342 surprise you? Why or why not?

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**Curriculum Connections:** story elements; characterization; setting; world-building; plot structure (The Hero's Journey and/or Overcoming the Monster) point of view; debate; arguments; environment; biodiversity; water; water issues; conservation of water; river dams; caring for the earth; era of relocation; Hwéeldi; the Navajo Long Walk; ; colonization; manifest destiny; identity; multi-heritage people; place names and other point of interest names; tribal citizenship; tribal sovereignty; perseverance; fortitude; hope; kinship; sibling relationships; empathy for others; overcoming self-doubt; teamwork; speculative fiction; ecological anxiety and grief.





# Healer of the Water Monster

by Brian Young

## About the book

Brian Young's (Navajo) debut novel, a contemporary Navajo hero's journey, features a seemingly ordinary boy who must save the life of a water monster—and help his uncle suffering from addiction—by discovering his own bravery and boundless love. An outstanding debut!

**Brian Young** is an author and filmmaker and an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. He grew up on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. Brian earned his BA in Film Studies at Yale University and his MFA in Creative Writing at Columbia University. Brian currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

## Discussion questions

1. Family dynamics are always changing. What strengthened Nathan's relationship with his grandmother, Nali? What challenged Nathan's relationship with his father? His mother? Uncle Jet?
2. Recurring topics include the environment, family, and friendship. What do you discover about water monster's sickness? How do you know Nathan perceives water monster as a genuine friend?
3. Being selfless takes courage. When did you know Nathan was fully invested in helping Nali, Uncle Jet, and Pond? Explain Nathan's actions that helped you determine your answers.
4. How does Nathan change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story? In your opinion, did Nathan fulfill his promise to heal water monster? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think the author created two parallel journeys for Nathan? Explain how both paths relate to today's society.

Guide prepared by Andrea Page (Lakota—Standing Rock). Andrea Page is an author and retired educator, copresident of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY.

**Curriculum Connections:** Navajo culture; sacrifice and family relationships; using Earth's gifts with respect; the importance of clean water and the Water Is Life movement; traditional planting techniques vs. conventional planting techniques; human choices and consequences to the environment; uranium mining on the Navajo Nation in the 1950s and its effects; Native American veterans; overcoming struggles such as bullying, divorce, alcoholism, and depression; problem-solving with fortitude.